

# **Environmental Assessment**

**Environmental Assessment (EA) Number: OR-056-01-068**

**Title: Trout Creek Boat Launch Expansion and Riparian Area  
Restoration**

**Serial Number or Project Number:**

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Office: Prineville District Office  
Deschutes Resource Area**

## **I. Purpose and Need for Action**

The proposed action will decrease to increase size and capability of an existing boat launch and eliminate use of multiple unauthorized launch sites throughout Trout Creek Recreation Site. Further, this action would protect and improve the riparian area, enhancing recreational users' experience as well as the natural and cultural resources.

Currently, only two vehicles can utilize the Trout Creek boat launch simultaneously. This has caused congestion as well as occasional user conflicts during peak use periods. Additionally, on any busy weekend, the designated launch area is full of rental and commercial boats and gear, causing even greater congestion problems. This issue was discussed in the 1993 Lower Deschutes River Management Plan (LDRMP), pg. 116, which mandated: "confine vehicle parking for raft rentals to designated spaces."

Riparian areas in the Trout Creek Recreation Site have been impacted by use of two unauthorized boat launch locations upstream from the designated launch and creation of connector trails from camp sites to the river. Soil and vegetation found on the trails accessing the river immediately downstream of the designated launch site have been heavily impacted. This concentrated use has precluded achieving one of the riparian goals mandated in the LDRMP (pg. 31), which stated: "That riparian plant communities will be managed to maintain or achieve a minimum of 60 percent of the ecological vegetative potential within 15 years," with the long term goal being full vegetative potential, depending on the specific site characteristics.

The boat launch expansion would allow for improved flow of vehicles and boats as well as provide a staging area for both private and commercial use. It would also decrease congestion and user conflicts. This expansion would encourage the use of the designated boat launch and reduce use of unauthorized sites. Eliminating launchings in these fragile areas would provide riparian area recovery.

Installation of a hardened trail downstream from the designated launch site would focus angler and rafter use in this area. The surrounding area would recover over time,

providing habitat essential for fish and wildlife species and esthetic improvement.

## **II. Proposed Action and Alternatives**

### **No Action**

No action would allow continued congestion at Trout Creek launch site and degradation associated with existing trails along the river and launching of boats in unauthorized, sensitive riparian areas. Additional damage to the riparian area within in the proposed project boundary would be expected to result in erosion and trenching of the bank. Not taking action to correct this problem would not comply with the LDRMP directives, which are to “protect and enhance,” (pg 23) all outstandingly remarkable values. These values were determined to be recreation, fisheries, wildlife, cultural, geologic, scenic and botanical. The reclamation of the riparian area vegetation would remain inadequate by plan guidelines. See Figure 1 for view of existing boat launch.

### **Proposed Action**

The proposed action would expand Trout Creek boat launch by approximately ten feet on both sides of the current launch to provide space for up to three vehicles to utilize the launch at a time. The expanded portions of the boat launch area would be graveled. Expansion work would be accomplished by BLM personnel using heavy equipment to remove existing vegetation, sloping the site and applying the gravel. In addition to the boat launch expansion, the proposed action would include developing a staging area east of the launch which users, private and rental, could use rather than occupying up the vehicle launch area for preparing their boats. Access to the staging area would be provided by two, 8 foot wide gaps with 18 inch high posts in the center of the gap to allow rafts to be carried over the post. Designated parking for raft rental companies would be south of the staging area to provide more efficient flow of customers area after receiving their equipment. The staging area would be monitored for impacts to the river bank. Increased erosion and additional vegetation impacts would result in the staging area also being hardened with gravel. See figure 2 for view of proposed launch area improvements.

In addition to the launch expansion and staging area, the proposed action would include construction of a designated trail through the riparian area downstream from the launch. This trail would focus continued river access for anglers and boaters onto one hardened area, reducing vegetative impacts from multiple trails. The designated trail would be constructed out of natural materials and recycled plastic materials and be placed to facilitate angler and rafter access to the river. All trail excavation and construction would be done with hand tools. The trail project would utilize an Outward Bound service project group, a program which allows them to put back into the resource and further educate their students.

Unauthorized launch sites would be posted “no launching.” Continued non-compliance

would result in barriers, constructed with materials such as large rocks from the area, to preclude launching from these sites and allow the riparian area to recover. Informational signs would also be placed at these sites and at the top of the proposed hardened trail to educate users about riparian areas and their benefits as well as directing the public to utilize the designated launch site and trails for river access. It is important to note that river access at these areas does not mean launching, but only access for anglers or rafters to the water or boats already launched from a designated launch site.

### **Alternatives Considered**

Alternatives considered during the planning of the proposed action, but rejected from further consideration include:

- reducing the number of launches allowed per day at Trout Creek,
- improving and staffing the uppermost unauthorized launch site within Trout Creek Recreational Area,
- eliminating river access within the effected riparian areas,
- planting of nonnative species such as, blackberry or hawthorn, to discourage public access to the areas,
- fencing of the affected area.

### **III. Description of the Affected Environment**

The proposed action is located within Trout Creek Recreation Area along the eastern bank of the lower Deschutes River between river miles 87.4 and 88.5. The legal location of Trout Creek Recreational Area, within Jefferson County, is Township 9 South, Range 14 East, Sections 5 and 6, of the Willamette Meridian (Maps 1 and 2)

All 11.5 acres of the recreation area are publicly owned and managed by the BLM. The lower Deschutes River, which forms the western boundary of the site, is managed cooperatively by the State of Oregon, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and the BLM.

The recreational area is located on the first terrace of the lower Deschutes River on a flat bed of quaternary alluvium at an elevation of 1,300 feet. The site's location lends it to a variety of recreation opportunities, including: fishing, rafting, camping, hiking, picnicking, sightseeing, wildlife observation and mountain biking. Trout Creek Recreational Site has historically been the most frequently used launch for multi-day trips in Segment 1 of the lower Deschutes River. It has also received steady use for hiking, fishing and biking. This level of use has resulted in recreationists using two unauthorized boat launch locations upstream from the designated launch and creation of trails from campsites to the river.

Human alterations to the site began almost 100 years ago with homesteading activity and the Oregon Trunk Railroad construction activity.

Rehabilitation efforts in the early 1990's resulted in exclosure fencing to preclude livestock access to the site, placement of barriers to limit vehicle access to the riparian zone, creation of hiking trails, and establishment of designated campsites. This effort resulted in a dramatic improvement of the impacted riparian area and a slow, progressive improvement of protected areas outside of the riparian zone.

With the exception of the areas noted in this EA, the riparian zone is in good and improving condition. Existing vegetation is composed of a variety of grasses, dominated by Reed canary grass, sedges, and rushes. The overstory is composed of a variety of trees and shrubs, including mock orange, willow and alder. Much of the site proposed for expansion and staging is covered by blackberry bushes, which are considered a noxious weed. Surrounding upland terraces were seeded with perennial grasses during the 1990s effort. Where vehicle access has been limited, good stands of perennial grasses, such as thickspike wheatgrass, needlegrass and bluebunch wheatgrass have established. Areas still receiving heavier human impacts are vegetated by big sagebrush and annual grasses such as cheatgrass. Noxious weeds, primarily diffuse knapweed, are also occurring in these zones.

The upland and riparian areas along the river provide quality habitat for a variety of wildlife. Fauna observed in the area include: mule deer, coyote, ground squirrels, snakes, various waterfowl, California quail, chukar, pheasant, great blue heron, osprey, bald and golden eagles, other raptors and various furbearers. The Northern Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus), occasionally seen along the river corridor, were found by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be worthy of protection under the Endangered Species Act and currently listed as threatened. This species is a seasonal migrant to the river corridor and is seen in the winter.

Fish species common to this segment of the river include rainbow trout, redband trout, fall and spring chinook salmon, summer steelhead, bull trout, northern pike minnow, chiselmouth, suckers, sculpins shiner species and the pacific lamprey. The sensitive fish species in the Deschutes River at this location are:

- Bull Trout (Salvelinus confluentus) were found by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be worthy of protection under the Endangered Species Act and is currently listed as threatened.
- Summer Steelhead (Oncorhynchus mykiss) is listed by National Marine Fisheries Service as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

There are currently approximately 130 feet of trails within the riparian area of the proposed project. This action will reduce those trails by approximately 90 feet.

## **IV. Impacts**

## **Soil and Vegetation**

### **No Action**

Soil conditions would continue to degrade in the form of compaction, trenching and erosion. Vegetation loss within the riparian area would continue as a result of various unauthorized launch sites and trails, with the potential for creation of new trails as others get too treacherous to utilize. No action would disregard management guidelines set by the LDRMP for vegetation of riparian areas. Exposed soil, created by the existing conditions in the project area, could potentially provide for nonnative plant invasion.

### **Proposed Action**

Short-term impacts to soil would result from boat launch expansion excavation and trail hardening. Long-term impacts to soils would include: reduced soil compaction, erosion, and increased bank stabilization. The primary vegetative impacts with the launch expansion would be to the blackberry bushes, a nonnative plant species within the expansion area, which will be removed. Hardened trail development would utilize existing, heavy use paths to the river. Vegetation would be affected by directing use to designated hardened areas for river access, reducing the human impacts on the remaining riparian area, allowing for natural recovery.

## **Wildlife**

### **No Action**

No action would result in continued degradation of wildlife habitat through the reduction of protective cover and forage. This alternative would not comply with the LDRMP guidelines concerning wildlife, which state: "habitat enhancement will result from ecological improvement, particularly in riparian areas."

### **Proposed Action**

Wildlife habitat would improve under the proposed action through the rehabilitation and recovery of the effected riparian areas, by focusing use to designated areas of access. Wildlife species, primarily small mammals and song birds using the blackberry patch, would lose that vegetation as habitat. A Physical Resource Data Summary completed by Jim Eisner, Fisheries Biologist, on a 1994 project, stated the riparian area is utilized by approximately 90 percent of the wildlife species at some point throughout the year. This demonstrates the great importance of the riparian area within the Deschutes River corridor.

## **Fisheries**

### **No Action**

Impacts would continue with degradation of the fishery through the reduction of habitat, cover and forage area. Additionally, there would be impacts due to the continued erosion, siltation and loss of habitat as additional trails and paths are created. No action would not comply with the fisheries guidelines set by the LDRMP, which state: “improve fish habitat in the main river.” (LDRMP pg. 104)

### **Proposed Action**

Expansion of Trout Creek boat launch to facilitate closing of unauthorized launch sites will protect spawning grounds in close proximity to closed areas. Fish habitat will improve with riparian recovery. Placement of the hardened trail to the river, and educational signs, will reduce pressure on the effected riparian areas. Increased riparian vegetation will reduce siltation and turbidity and provide cover and shade along the rivers’ edge. Increased vegetation will also provide habitat for the multitude of insect species along the river utilized by fish.

## **Threatened or Endangered Plants or Animals**

### **No Action**

Impacts would continue with degradation through the reduction of habitat, cover and forage area. Additionally, there would be impacts due to the continued erosion, siltation and loss of habitat as additional trails and paths are created.

### **Proposed Action**

Based on existing impacts to the site, results of botanical inventory in adjacent riparian areas and the minimal chance of a special status plant being found within the project area, the district botanist has waived field clearance of the project (Waiver 01027, attached). No impacts to threatened, endangered or other sensitive plants are expected. No impacts would be expected to sensitive wildlife or fish species.

## **Recreation**

### **No Action**

Visitors’ recreational experience, which includes intrinsic and esthetic values, would decline with continued and increased impacts to the project area. The designated launch area is overcrowded on high use days. Existing trails are somewhat difficult and treacherous for many users, increasing likelihood of injury. Listed as high priority in the recreational segment of the LDRMP is the improvement of resource conditions, reducing user conflicts and improving public safety at facilities, as well as, designating parking spaces for raft rental outfits. No action would not address concerns referred to in the management plan.

### **Proposed Action**

Launch area expansion and placement of a hardened access trail would encourage utilization of designated areas for river access. This would reduce unauthorized trailing and impacts to the riparian zone in these heavily used areas. Launch area crowding would be reduced. Use of interpretive and educational signs about riparian area values would increase user understanding. Increased esthetic values resulting from recovery of the riparian area would enhance the users; recreational experience.

## **Cultural Resources**

### **No Action**

No action would allow potential damage and loss to archaeological sites as a result of continued entrenching and erosion.

### **Proposed Action**

There are no known cultural resource sites within the project area. However, given the proposed project's proximity to the Deschutes River and the nature of the landform, the likelihood exists that cultural resources could be encountered during project activities. Given that consideration, the proposed boat launch expansion and trail hardening activities could result in damage, displacement or destruction of cultural materials.

## **Wild and Scenic Rivers**

### **No Action**

No action would result in diminishment of the recreation, fisheries, wildlife, cultural resources and scenic outstandingly remarkable values in this segment of the river.

### **Proposed Action**

Congress found the Deschutes River to meet Wild and Scenic designation in 1988, based on several outstandingly remarkable values. Those values were, recreation, fisheries, wildlife, cultural resources, geological, scenic and botanical. Managing agencies are mandated to, "protect and enhance," these values. The proposed action would maintain or improve all of these values.

## **Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts**

For this project the only foreseeable mitigation actions needed, other than those previously mentioned in the Environmental Assessment, would be to rehabilitate unauthorized trails and boat launch areas following project completion. Annual monitoring of the site would be accomplished to assess any need for future vegetative rehabilitation needs.

The project area would experience the following residual impacts:

- Improved riparian vegetation and bank stability in the project area.
- Enhances wildlife and fisheries habitat.
- Enhances esthetics of the recreational area.
- Improved trail access to the river from camps within the recreational site.
- All ground disturbing project activities would be monitored by a cultural resource specialist or technician to ensure that those activities do not inadvertently impact cultural resources.
- In the event of inadvertent discovery of human remains or other cultural materials, all activities within the immediate vicinity of the discovery will cease until an evaluation of that discovery has been made by a qualified cultural resource specialist.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

The proposed actions direct effect would be the maintain accessibility to the river for various users, both with the launch expansion and the trail hardening. User conflicts would be minimized and public safety would increase. Closing and rehabilitation of the unauthorized launch sites and trails throughout the Trout Creek Recreation Area would, in time, increase fish and wildlife habitat.

## **V. No Impact Items**

The following resources were considered and evaluated, but will not be addressed within the EA due to the fact that they would either not be affected or do not exist within the project area:

- Agricultural Lands (prime or unique)
- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Environmental Justice
- Flood plains
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Paleontological Resources
- Wastes (hazardous or solid)
- Wetlands
- Wilderness (including Wilderness Study Areas)

## **VI. Consultation and Coordination**



**Persons and Agencies Consulted**

John Hanf, BLM Natural Resource Staff Lead  
Jim Eisner, BLM District Fisheries Biologist  
Ron Halvorson, BLM District Botanist  
Ron Gregory, BLM Area Archeologist  
Tom Mottl, BLM Recreation Planner

**Preparer**

Christopher Edgar, Deschutes River Ranger

NEPA requirements met:

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Marci Todd  
Deschutes Environmental Coordinator

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Date